

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 40

NEWSWEEK
10 October 1983



Photos by Wally McNamee—NEWSWEEK

With wife, Sophia, at Long Island home: A long love affair with intelligence

A Most Unlikely Superspook

Except for the pistols tucked beneath their jackets, the two fresh-faced young men sitting in the front seat of the black Chrysler might have been mistaken for trainees at a good brokerage house. Behind them, his jaws quivering with the car's vibration, his head cocked in a characteristic expression of quizzical attention, sat William J. Casey, 70, multimillionaire, lawyer, investor, politician, tax expert, amateur historian—and director of central intelligence (DCI). "Mr. Casey," one of the agents said, "they've got a call on the secure phone. Do you want to go back?" Casey grunted yes and the car turned toward the antebellum mansion on Long Island that he has owned for 35 years. Lunch would have to wait. This call from his deputy wasn't about Thailand or Chad or any of the thousands of men at his command around the world. It was about how to handle congressional testimony—an overt operation of extreme sensitivity.

While Casey and Ronald Reagan are close—perhaps closer than any DCI and president since the agency's founding—the CIA director's relations with Congress need constant patching. Many members of the intelligence committees remain disturbed by what they view as his cavalier approach to keeping Congress informed. In August 1981, after his poorly qualified chief of clandestine operations, Max Hugel, was forced to resign, Casey found his own job threatened. After a brief investiga-

tion, the most enthusiastic endorsement Senate Intelligence Committee chairman Barry Goldwater could muster was that Casey was not "unfit to serve." Last June came "Debategate." Casey denied White

House chief of staff James A. Baker III's assertion that he had received purloined debate-briefing papers from Jimmy Carter's 1980 campaign (NEWSWEEK, July 18).

Bullfrog: Part of Casey's problem is his chronic inarticulateness, particularly unnerving given his sharp mind. In his bullfrog, often inaudible mumbling, "Nicaragua" comes out "Nicowawa," prompting a group of Democrats to say they won't approve plans to "overthrow the government of any country Casey couldn't pronounce." Even the president jokes about it, telling one GOP senator that Casey "will be the first DCI who didn't need a scrambler phone." But deeper unease about Casey grows out of his heedless nature. His affinity for action and risk, healthy for money-making, can be worrisome in other realms. As DCI he is always in motion, traveling at least 50 percent of the time, occasionally on commercial flights under an assumed name, a practice one agency source calls "extremely risky." With Casey, the question is what happens when the to-hell-with-the-niceties approach that has served him so well in business is applied to the CIA.

Casey won the CIA job after managing Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, but

his interest in the post had its origin in a longtime love affair with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the World War II precursor to the CIA. While Casey's bad eyesight kept him out of direct espionage, a contact in OSS chief William Donovan's New York law firm landed him a job in the OSS Washington office. In the last months of the war, as London station chief, he organized a large-scale operation that dropped some 150 agents behind German lines to disrupt Nazi forces and assist the Allied advance. Some recent scholarship suggests that the mission produced few concrete results. But over the years there has been a tendency on the part of the fraternity of OSS veterans, including Casey, to transfer their glowing wartime memories to current operations.

Preparation: When Casey first took over the CIA he was widely criticized for his lack of relevant experience in the 35 years since the end of the war. But for the bulk of the agency's activity—the collection and analysis of intelligence—Casey's business career was solid preparation. In 1937, after waiting on tables to help pay his way through Fordham and St. John's Law School, Casey went to work for a newsletter that advised companies on the tangled new legislation coming out of Washington. The exercise—presenting complex information in a clear way—was not so different from intelligence work, except that there was money in it. From 1954 to 1971, Casey's own firm, the Institute for Business Planning, helped produce dozens of how-to books on subjects like estate planning and mutual funds. They still circulate widely. "I have one on my desk right now," chuckles former CIA Director William Colby from his Washington law office.

Casey's appetite for digesting information—and now intelligence—is prodigious. Many public figures feel obliged to affect a taste for books; Casey's is real. Except for golf with friends like William

Simon and George Shultz, he does little in his spare time but read. Author of one nontechnical book, a guide to the American Revolution, he has completed a second on the OSS, which he won't publish until he leaves his present job.

This scholarly inclination stands in sharp contrast to Casey's freewheeling financial style. Instead of coasting with a cushy corporate life, Casey relished risks. He helped found many high-technology firms—often receiving stock in exchange for his legal work. The gambles paid off, helping Casey amass a fortune of \$8 million to \$12 million. Several shareholder

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